



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Wimbledon

Wimbledon: 1989 and 2022

June 27, 2022

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, the Wimbledon tennis tournament begins in London. Once COVID lowers its head, assuming it ever does, I plan to attend this tradition-bound, revered tournament one more time. I attended the event in 1989, but for only one day.

I am cheering for one of my favorite all-time players, Rafael Nadal, to win the men's singles. However, Rafa has been playing this season with an injured left foot. He still manages to win major tournaments, but he said he cannot continue to play and risk permanent injury. More on the 2022 tournament later in this article.

Several years ago, I removed an entry from my bucket list: To attend or hit balls in all four of the tennis Grand Slam tournament venues. They are the US Open, the French Open, the Australian Open, and Wimbledon.

I did not attend the Australian Open itself, which is held in Melbourne, but I was able to play for an hour with the resident pro on the central court where the Australian Open finals are held. Holly and I attended the other three contests. So, I will stretch my bragging rights a bit and claim I've been to all four of the Big Four. In addition, the pro at the Melbourne court let me win a few points. He earned a commensurate tip while I boosted my pride about my modest tennis skills.

During my lecturing years (1980-2000), I spent several weeks a year in Europe. I spoke twice a year at sessions in London and Amsterdam, with once-a-year dates in several other west European cities. My routine was two three-day lectures: Wednesday-Friday of the first week; the weekend off for sightseeing and writing; Monday-Wednesday of the second week.

I began to play tennis at the ripe age of 35---ripe for picking up a new game, so I was never a natural tennis player. But my love of the game had nothing to do with my skills. I was also a fan of watching the pros play, but I had seen very few games in-person. Mostly TV contests, where it was impossible to gain an appreciation of the speed of the game, the velocity and spin of the ball passed between the players, and the stamina of the players themselves.

In late June 1998, I had the weekend off from lectures in London. At that time, the Wimbledon tennis tournament was underway at the All England Club, in a suburb outside of central London. Obtaining directions from the hotel concierge, we took the Tube and buses to the club. Our practice was (is) to use public transit systems in foreign cities. With "no cabs" and walking, it's the best way to experience and learn about places.

We were informed non-reserved seating was available, even on weekends, if we did not mind waiting in line on Church Street for admittance onto the grounds and then taking what seats were available on the outdoor courts, numbered 2 – 19 in the left photo of Figure 1. It was a beautiful day, no clouds, little humidity, and a benevolent temperature for a summer day in London. Perfect for queuing in a line with an umbrella, a piece of cheese, and a glass of wine while waiting to watch the best tennis players in the world ply their trade. I was far removed from a lectern.

The tournament was (and likely still is) very well organized. Assistants on Church Street directed the waiting crowd where and how to line up in a long queue along the street. They informed us, quite accurately, how long our wait would be before we could purchase our tickets at the locale noted in the photos in Figure 1 as "5." As spectators left the tournament, every few

minutes, we were directed to move forward in the queue, while being informed, “This section of the queue has about 20 minutes (or whatever) of wait time left.”

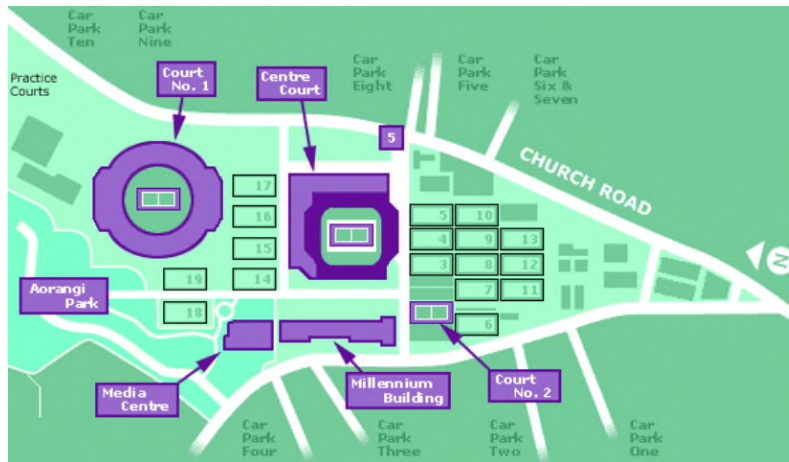
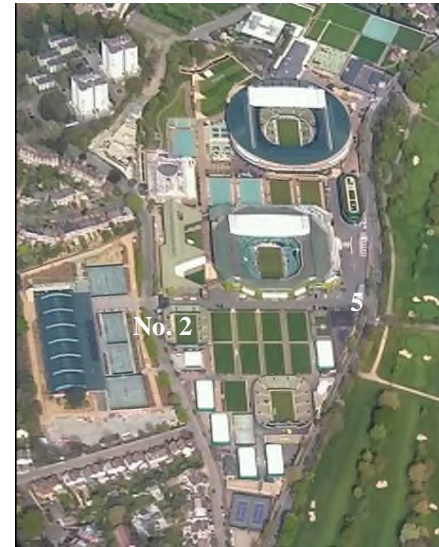


Figure 1. Site of Wimbledon tennis tournament.



Note: The left photo in Figure 1 has the top of the photo to the east with north to the left. The right photo has been turned 90 degrees. North is at the top, with east on the right. Notice the notations in both figures of “No. 2” and “5.” Also, the right photo shows that Court No. 1 and Centre court have automated court covers installed. These covers had not been installed when I attended the tournament.

Unlike the detailed-fixated officials at the Masters Golf Tournament in Georgia, we could take our glasses of wine and cheese inside the grounds. The Masters required (likely still requires...I attended in the 1980s) any customer holding a cup of liquid to discard the cup and its contents before entering the course. ...Or pour the contents into another cup that had no commercial emblems emblazoned on its sides. Masters’ official, “7/11 coffee! No advertisements are allowed at the Masters. Kindly drink your beverage from this Masters lilly-white Lilly cup.”

But who would want to bring their own goodies to Wimbledon? We tossed our remaining food and drink into a trash bin, knowing strawberries and champagne awaited us inside the Wimbledon grounds.

The queue to the grounds was on the other side of Church Street, but a pedestrian overhead pass was available near the entrance gate (near the note “5”) to prevent us from having to contend with vehicle traffic on the street.

The entrance fee for access to the grounds and non-stadium seats was modest, but not so for reserved seats in one of the stadiums. It made no matter to us, one way or the other. And as it turned out, the spectator sitting next to courts 3-13---various seats in which we sat---were, as the Brits say, super.

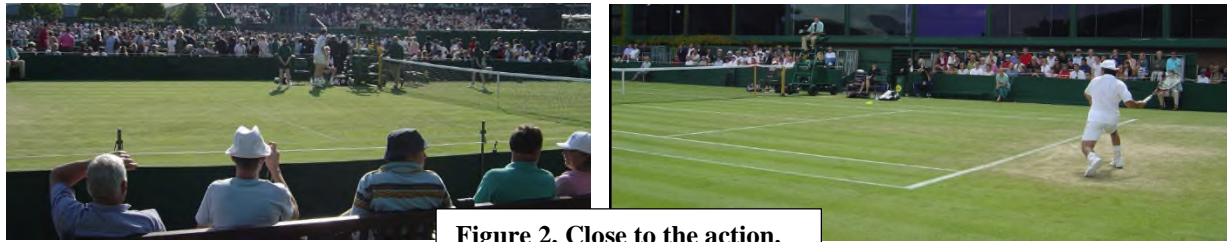


Figure 2. Close to the action.

As seen in Figure 2, the outside courts put the viewer close to the action. These photos do not do justice to this aspect of the scene, as the players appear farther away from, say, the front seats than they actually are. I could easily hear the pants and groans of the players. I could see the sweat falling from their faces. Who needed a jillion-dollar stadium seat anyway?

In hindsight, we were in luck. Just as we had gained entrance to the grounds, and were strolling past courts 3, 4, and 5, discussing which match to watch, we spotted some open seats on the first row of one of these courts. I cannot remember which one...they looked identical anyway.



Figure 3. 1989 Wimbledon:
Birthing a Legend.

Sitting down, we glanced at the score board and noticed the contestants were Bill Scanlon and Michael Chang, relatively obscure players on the tour and unknown to me. Little did we know that Michael Chang would win the French Open that same year (1989). It was a huge upset over the great Ivan Lendl, and gained acclaim for Chang as the youngest player to have ever won a Grand Slam trophy (17 years, 109 days). We were watching the birthing of a tennis legend, as seen in Figure 3.¹

We came in during the second set. Michael had won the first set 6-4 and would win the second set 6-3. Bill Scanlon won the third set 2-6 but lost the fourth set 6-3 giving Michael the win in the 128-player bracket. He later lost before reaching the quarter finals.

Boris Becker defeated the defending champion Stefan Edberg 6-0, 7-6, 6-4 to win the men's (ahem, gentlemen's) singles title. Steffi Graf defeated Martina Navratilova 6-2, 6-7, 6-1 for the women's (ahem ladies') championship.

Upcoming Tournament. For the upcoming Wimbledon, the men's No. 1 world-ranked player cannot play in the tournament. Daniil Medvedev is from Russia and Russia invaded Ukraine, so Mr. Medvedev is banned. Pity that Vladimir Putin is not seeded in the tennis world. He's the one that should be banned, not a blameless athlete. The No. 2 player is injured. Alexander Zverev tore ligaments in his right ankle at the French Open.

¹ Courtesy of Bing. With no attribution of the photo being taken at Wimbledon. But the all-white outfit---required at Wimbledon---and the dark green backdrop---at one end of the main court---are indicators of the photo's origin.

I favor Novak Djokovic to win his fourth consecutive championship at Wimbledon. Unlike the Australian and US Opens, as finicky as the Wimbledon officials are, they do not require the players to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

As mentioned earlier, I am cheering for Rafael Nadal, but I don't think he can beat Novak on grass. Besides, his left foot must be shot-up with pain killers every time he plays. The result is a numb foot. It is amazing that he won the recent French Open playing with a numb foot, even coming from a two-set deficit to beat Djokovic during the tournament.

For the women's crown? Iga Swiatek is my choice. She is on a 35-match winning streak. She looks as impregnable as Serena Williams did a few years ago. Serena is playing this year. If her dominating serve holds up, even at 40 years old, she should mow-down her earlier contestants. That said, Serena has been out of competition for just over a year. As great a player as she is, she's human and humans' skills get rusty if they are not used.

But Swiatek, at 21, could be the next Serena. Here is what the periodical *The Indian Express* said about Iga's game. Comparing her forehand topspin to that of Nadal's is high praise:

Her forehand and backhand are fast and powerful, with her forehand being hit with significant topspin due to her employing an extreme western grip; on her run to the title at the French Open in 2020, Świątek's average forehand speed was 73 mph (118 km/h), only 4 km/h below that of the average male forehand speed. She even hit some forehands up to 79 mph (127 km/h), the fastest of any female player in the draw. Her forehand topspin reached 3453 rpm at the French Open, comparable with her idol Rafael Nadal.

Years ago, when I was playing tennis around five times a week, I had the good fortune to hit three times a week for several years with a much better player. He had a punishing forehand topspin stroke. For my first few weeks of hitting with him, I was thankful for a ball to go behind the backdrop curtain. It gave me time to mentally get my tennis wits together and to physically get my breath back. ...For those days again? In a way, yes, but upon reflection, no. I'm thankful to have had that experience in the first place.

Once COVID and its relatives have calmed down, I may be headed back to Wimbledon to sit in one of those jillion-dollar stadium seats. Strawberries, champagne, no queues; padded seats protected from sun and rain. As they say, "living well is the best revenge."